I couldn't sleep. My wife and I stayed on the top floor of a cheap London hotel. We're frugal travelers, saving our cash for more important things like Michelin starred Slovenian dinners and Costa Rican ziplining. However, that night I wished we had splurged on an actual room instead of an attic. The ceilings sloped, sweaty warm, closing in. I took a Xanax and Kara spooned me, combing my hair with her fingers until I fell into a druggy sleep.

I should be excited. We were in one of my favorite cities in the world. En route to Greece. My favorite country.

But the trouble was, a month earlier, my dad died.

From Long Island, he and mom were visiting us in LA. I returned home from work one day to find mom chatting with friends over tea while dad lay, wet, in our guest bed. Delirious, he asked me to change his diapers, calling me mommy. Not something anyone wants to hear from their father, close as we were. I put the kibosh on mom's tea party and called an ambulance.

A Glendale Memorial ER doctor, also a consultant on Grey's Anatomy, blew off dad's frailty, diagnosing him with dehydration, and tried to send us home with Gatorade suggestions. This same doctor casually mentioned that

my six-foot-tall father weighed in at one-hundred pounds. This asshole needed to stick to TV.

After I insisted they admit him, he was not only diagnosed with pneumonia, but a nurse discovered a hole in his esophagus. Leave it to nurses. No wonder he choked and gagged while eating Chinese Food. Dad would reassure us it's post nasal drip. Not to worry. But after every bite, he'd spittle and cough and wheeze. Dad wasn't going to let a gaping hole in his throat get between him and his Chicken Chow Mein.

On Easter, dad's surgeon dropped by, dressed in a church suit and told my mom and I that dad could live another ten years with his brand spanking new feeding tube. Things were looking up, so we sent them back to Long Island with a crateful of liquid food, hoping mom's one good eye had clear enough aim to pour dad's dinner into a funnel.

But once home, a slew of his cancers flew into a rage and attacked him like sharks to chum. He woke up one morning to use the bathroom, and fell to the floor. Blood gushing from his ass.

A year prior, after dad had been diagnosed with prostate cancer (or as my mom would say, Prostrate Cancer), he and I sat on my porch where he

confessed he'd never had a prostate exam. "Ya know, Nance," he said. "To be honest, I just never wanted another man's hand up my ass." Fair enough.

I'd often say, if my dad wasn't my dad, I'd want Jimmy Stewart or Alan Alda. Yet my father did encompass both George Bailey's heart and Hawkeye's dry wit. For my mother's 80th birthday, my entire family treated her to a weekend in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Again, we're all very cheap. One of the gifts we gave her was a scrap book of photos and notes. Our best mom memories. At the end of the weekend, my 85-year-old father drove my wife and I back to our Brooklyn rental, and as mom got out of the car to hug us good-bye, she farted long and she farted hard. My father said, "I bet no one included THAT in the scrap book."

When dad returned to the hospital, mom did what she usually did in a crisis. Drink from whatever bottles she could find, ingesting whatever pills she could take. We'd call and call. No answer. Neighborhood friends got EMTs to break into the house where they found her lying unconscious on the bedroom floor in her own piss and shit. Bottles, prescription and booze, littering the scene. They rushed her to the same hospital as my father, placing her on the floor above him. He'd request she be wheeled down to visit him.

He loved her. Even when I wanted him to hate her.

She eventually moved to physical rehab. Although I think she needed an altogether different type of rehab. I flew to New York, where I taxi'd her back and forth from rehab to the hospital, me railing against her, yelling the most horrible things. I wasn't going to hide how much I hated her. I loved her too much to do that.

Dad's new Long Island doctor didn't even come to his room, much less from church. He called on a hallway hospital phone. "He's too thin and frail," the bodyless voice said. "There's no hope for surgery." That's it? A doctor calls you on a hospital hallway phone, like a telemarketer, to inform you your father's chances of survival don't exist?

I never saw my older sister cry. But that day, she fell into me and wept. Being fourteen years apart, it wasn't always easy finding commonality – me, queer, her straight, me, running to adventure, her moving from one suburban house to another. Yet no matter how different we were, we were both crazy about our dad.

We brought him home so he wouldn't die in a puke-colored hospital room. He'd be in the family room, his favorite in the house. Where he read

Newsday every night and watched The Mets win some and lose most. Where he kicked his feet up on his chocolate syrup-stained blue recliner, and place his false teeth on the table beneath the two-foot Christmas tree. Where he coughed up Chicken Chow Mein. Where he and mom jitterbugged to Glenn Miller.

Mom returned from rehab a day before dad came home to die. In the corner, we replaced the dinner table with a hospital bed. Two female EMT's lifted him out of the ambulance and dropped him off to us like a sack of garbage. I wanted to yell, THIS MAN HAS A MASTER'S DEGREE IN SOCIAL WORK FROM COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY AND LOVES CHOCOLATE COVERED CHERRIES. HAVE SOME RESPECT.

At night, I'd lie on the couch, a few feet from him, trying to sleep, but really listening for the pull of oxygen from his nose. Sssssssssss Scchhhhhhhhhh Sssssssssss Scchhhhhhhhhh. One night, fitting the tubes back in his old man nose, around his old man ears, we stopped and took each other in. He placed his smooth dying hands on mine.

As the days wore on, he asked, “Why won’t god take me?” as if I knew. So I tried to know. “When you’ve seen everyone, Dad. When they’ve had a chance to say goodbye.”

His son-in-law, his granddaughters, his friends. So many friends. For two weeks we stayed; for two weeks he held on. My sister and I would sneak out at night to a local bistro where we’d drink wine, stumbling home, cracking up like a couple of teenagers, letting the alcohol convince our anguish to lighten up, if only for an hour. We knew we had to return to our real lives at some point, so on Memorial Day, my sister drove back upstate and I flew back to LA.

Twenty-four hours later, my mother called. “He’s gone,” she said, sounding stronger than I’d ever guessed she could. She and Dad spent the early morning hours, alone, saying their goodbyes, their “we’ll always love each others,” their “we’ll see each other agains.” I knew that’s how it was meant to be. Them alone. Maybe that was me alleviating some guilt. Maybe. But there it was. We left and he died.

Do I stay home? Do I take a shower? I didn't know. My father had never died before. I went to work and a fellow teacher asked how I was, like it was any other day. I said, "My father died."

For dad's memorial, I flew back to my childhood home again. The wind could whistle through the holes in me. But the summer air was thick. Much like that London attic room. Sweaty. Warm. Closing in.